

# Brain-based Strategies and Critical Thinking to Maximize Vocabulary Acquisition

This interactive webinar will focus on maximizing vocabulary acquisition for English learners with a focus on easy-to-implement classroom strategies and activities based on brain-based learning and critical thinking.

This session will:

- explore how to assess students' vocabulary knowledge and determine what words to teach
- discuss how the brain learns and stores words
- share and demonstrate instructional strategies including graphic organizers, word study, word sorts, and games



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# Using Brain-based Strategies and Critical Thinking to Maximize Vocabulary Acquisition



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**I am a word nerd and proud of it!**



# Today's Focus:

- Demonstrate how to select vocabulary words to teach
- Discuss and practice brain-based vocabulary strategies
- Discuss and practice critical thinking strategies for teaching vocabulary



# Vocabulary Word Selection



# Vocabulary Word Selection

1. Use the 3 Tier System to select words
2. Assess students' word knowledge
3. Select only **5-8** words to teach

# Beck and McKeon's 3 Tier (Level) System

Tier 1	<b>**Tier 2**</b>	Tier 3
Common words that students should know	Words that students should know for future English study and communication	Words that students will rarely need to know or use
<b>Good Excellent</b>	<b>Exceptional Outstanding Superb</b>	<b>Sterling Stupendous</b>



# Today's Vocabulary

<b>Tier 1</b>	<b>**Tier 2**</b>	<b>Tier 3</b>
Common words that students should know	Words that students should know for future English study and communication	Words that students will rarely need to know or use
<b>Smell (verb, noun)</b>	<b>Odor (noun)</b>  <b>Fragrance (noun), fragrant (adj)</b>  <b>Aroma (noun), aromatic (adj)</b>  <b>To Sniff (verb), sniff (noun)</b>	<b>Pungent (adjective)</b>

# Assessment of Word Knowledge

1. Write a list of possible vocabulary words on the board.
2. Ask students to do the following:
  - Raise your hand if you have never seen or heard the word before.
  - Raise your hand if you have seen or heard the word before, but are not sure what it means.
  - Raise your hand if you know the word well. Tell me what it means.
3. Select 5-8 words to teach that most of the students do not know or do not know well.

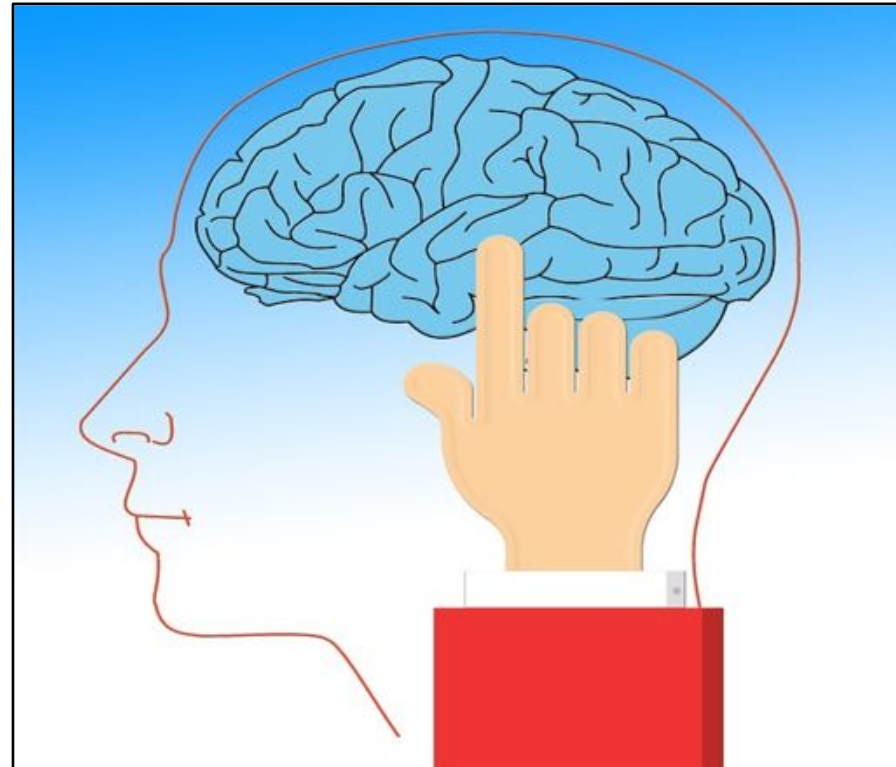
# Knowledge Rating Scale: Student Self-Assessment

Word	Know it Well	Have Seen or Heard it	Do not know it
Smell	✓		
Odor		✓	
Sniff			
Pungent			



**What strategies do you use when introducing vocabulary?**

# Brain-based Strategies and Critical Thinking



# Brain-based vocabulary strategies

Our brain remembers words by how they are connected to other words, images, and information.

## Example:

What is a chicken?

What is a kitchen?



# Introducing Vocabulary Words

When introducing a new vocabulary word, you should provide students at the **minimum...**

1. a student-friendly definition
2. a rich context
3. a picture or visual representation

**Help students make connections with the word!**



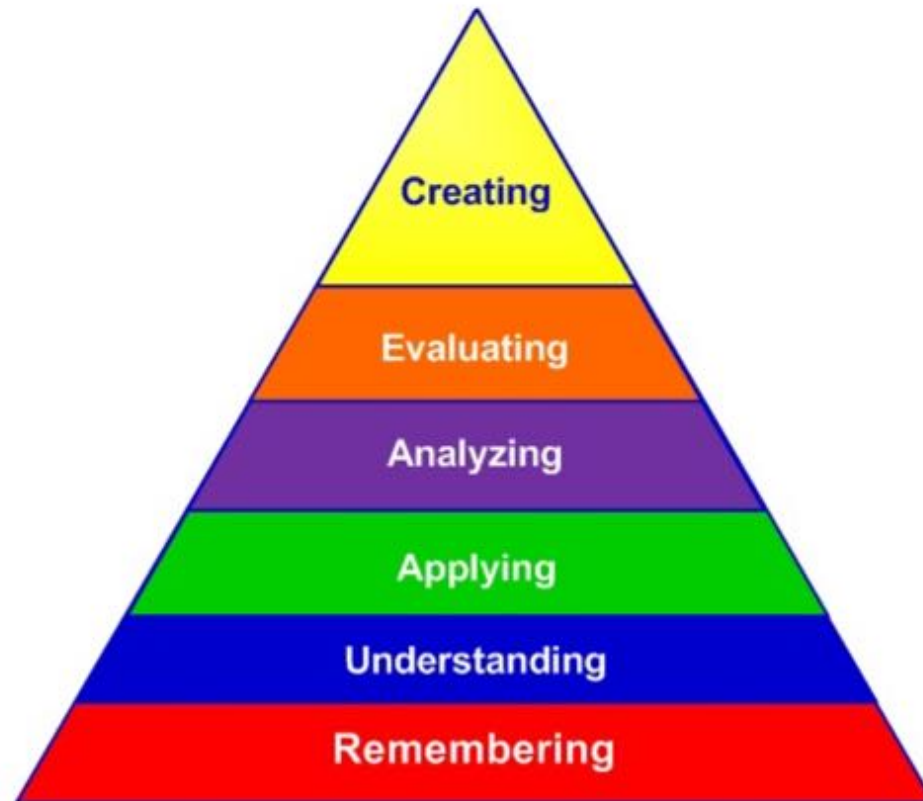
# Introducing Vocabulary Words

	Odor	Fragrance/ Fragrant	Aroma	Pungent	Sniff
Student Definition	A bad smell	A beautiful, sweet smell	A good smell; usually food	A spicy smell	To take a quick smell
Word in Context	The garbage had a strong <b>odor</b> .	The flowers were very <b>fragrant</b> .	I love the <b>aroma</b> of coffee.	Onions and garlic are <b>pungent</b> .	The dog <b>sniffed</b> the ground.
Visual					

# Critical Thinking Skills & Vocabulary

You want students to think about the **meanings** of words.

Blooms Taxonomy - Revised



# **Brain-based Vocabulary Strategies: Analyze and Evaluate Words**

1. Frayer Model
2. Word Map
3. Select the Best Word
4. Degrees of Meaning
5. Word Analysis
6. Charades

# Activity 1: Frayer Model

Have students make connections with the word


**Step 1:** Ss write vocabulary word in the center.

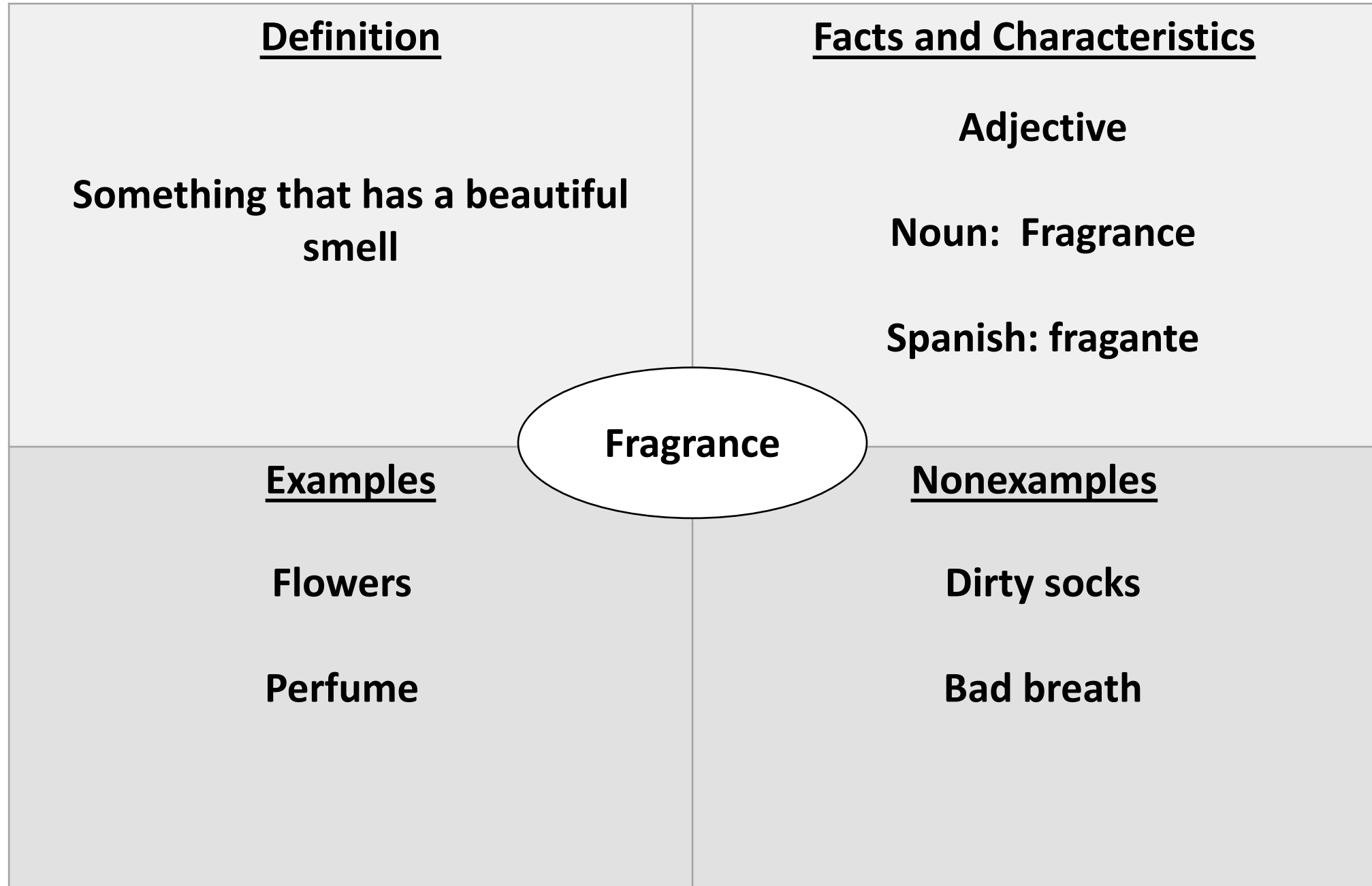
**Step 2:** Ss work individually or in pairs to complete the card.

**Step 3:** Ss share and talk about their cards with other Ss.

**Frayer Model**

<b>Definition in your own words</b>	<b>Facts/characteristics</b>
<b>Examples</b>	<b>Nonexamples</b>





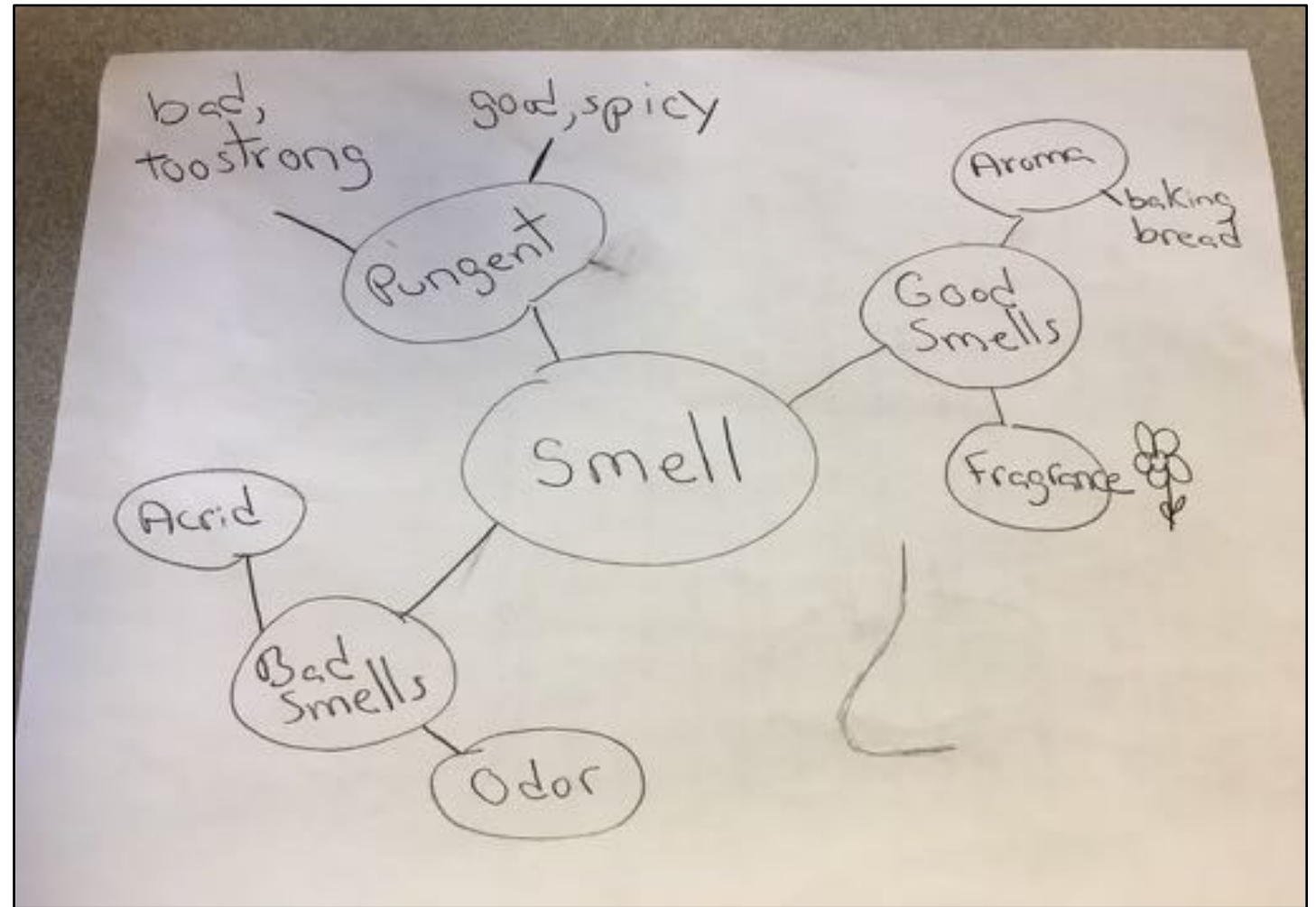
# Activity 2: Word Map

Show how words relate to each other

**Step 1:** Ss write the vocabulary word in the center (in pairs or small groups)

**Step 2:** Ss brainstorm and write down connections between other words.

**Step 3:** Ss draw pictures and other information to help them understand and remember





**How might you adapt these ideas  
for your classroom?**



# Activity 3: Select the Best Word

Which word(s) would you use to describe the smell of this image?

## Vocabulary Word List:

1. **fragrant**
2. **pungent**
3. Has a good **aroma**
4. Has an **odor**
5. **sniff**



# Activity 3: Select the Best Word

Which word(s) would fit best in this sentence?

**Vocabulary Word List:**

1. fragrance

2. pungent

3. aroma

4. odor

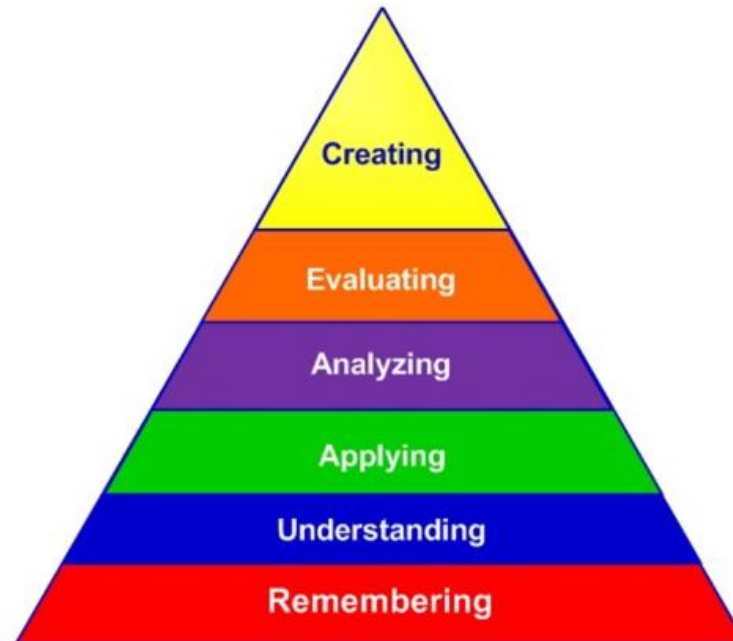
5. sniff

Soaps and shampoos often have a strong \_\_\_\_\_.



**What level of critical thinking are students using in “Select the Best Word” ?**

Blooms Taxonomy - Revised



## **Activity 4: Degrees of Meaning**

Evaluate the meaning of each word and how it differs from the other words.

**Step 1:** Put students in groups of 3-4.

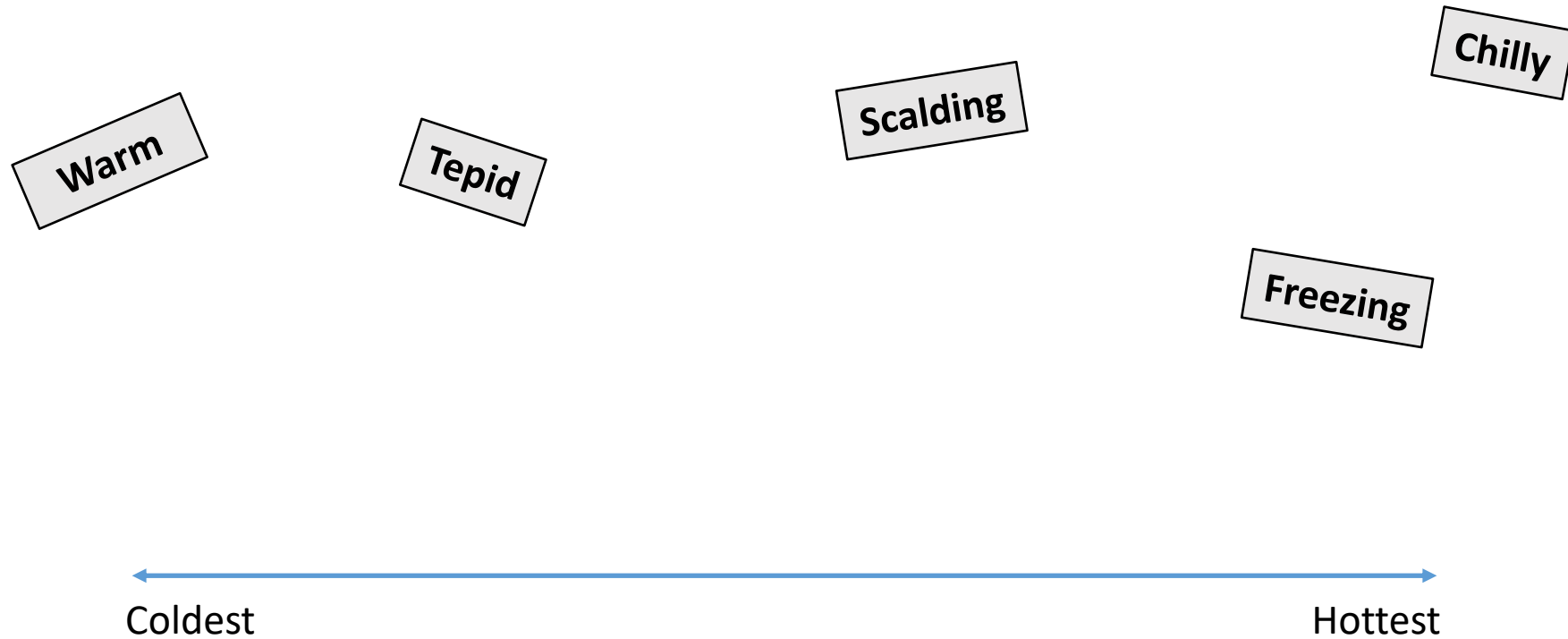
**Step 2:** Give a Ss cards with words on them.

- Students can also cut words out from a provided list.

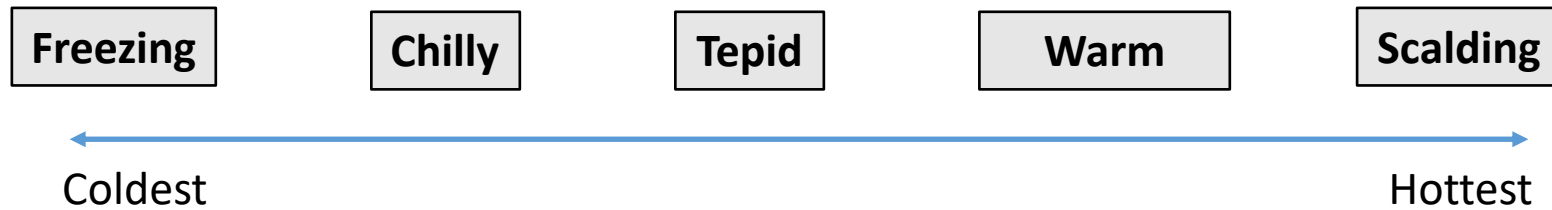
**Step 2:** Students discuss what the words mean.

**Step 3:** Students put the words in order based on determined degree of meaning.

# Activity 4: Degrees of Meaning



# Activity 4: Degrees of Meaning





**How might you adapt this activity to fit your classroom context?**



# Word Analysis



**Give a child a definition and they will know the word.**

**Teacher a child to analyze words and they will know  
thousands more!**

# Teach Prefixes, Suffixes, Root Words, and Compound Words

- **Prefix** – comes before the root word  
mis (wrong)      misspell      “spell wrong”
- **Suffix** – comes after the noun  
Ful (full of)      helpful      “full of help”
- **Root Words** – the word that holds it together  
spell    help
- **Compound Words** – two nouns together  
Toothbrush      tooth + brush

Root:

**frac**  
**frag**

Definition:

**to**  
**break**

Picture/Symbol:



Example Words:

Fraction – part of a whole

Fragment – a broken piece

Fragile – easily broken

Sentence:

I was Very Careful when I  
held the fragile Vase.

## **Activity 5: Word Analysis**

Analyze words by looking at the parts of the word

**Step 1:** Write the word on the board.

**Step 2:** Ask students to look for parts of the word that they know.

**Step 3:** Ask students what the word means.

**Step 4:** Ask students to use the word in a meaningful sentence.

**Step 5:** Do an example with the class first.

# Activity 5: Word Analysis

Example: misplace      Mis = wrong    place = location

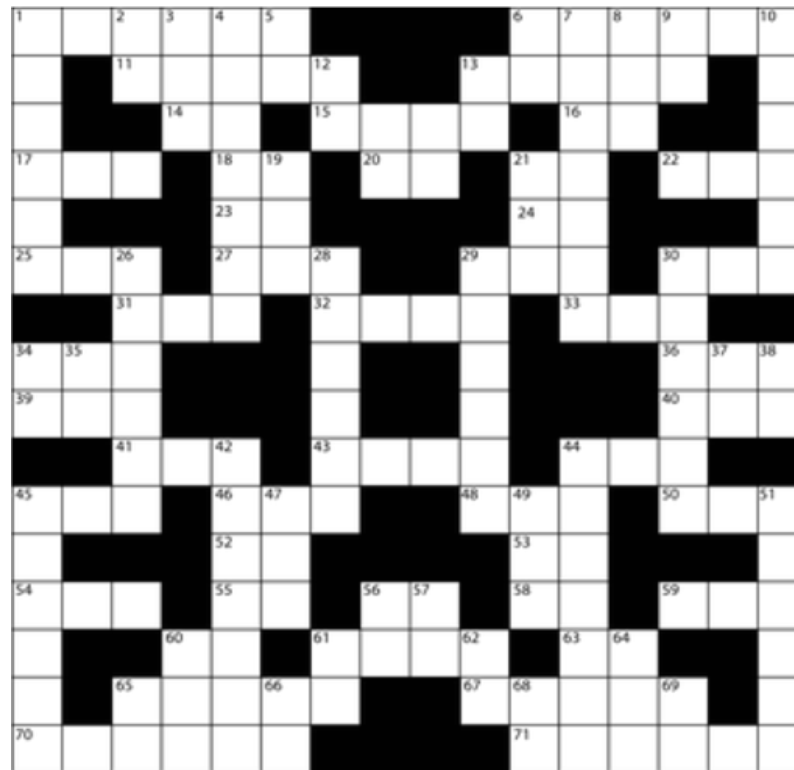
“I misplaced my car keys and couldn’t drive my car.”

Your Turn: **Unbreakable**

1. Analyze the word
2. What does it mean?
3. Use it in a meaningful sentence.



**Do word searches and/or crossword puzzles require critical thinking about vocabulary?**





# **Activity 6: Charades (Acting out the Word)**

Use word games that require critical thinking

**Step 1:** Provide one student with a vocabulary word.

**Step 2:** Make sure the student understands the word.

**Step 3:** The student acts the word out in front of the class without using any words.

**Step 4:** The other students guess what word the student is acting out.

# Activity 6: Charades: Let's Try it!

1. I will act out a word. Watch and tell me what word it is.
2. I will give you a word. Tell me how you would act it out.

# Practice & Review Vocabulary Words

Students need to **hear** the word in different contexts.

Students need to **read** the word in different contexts.

Students need to **say** the word in sentences they create.

Students need to **write** the word in sentences.

- **Short-Term Memory:** will remember for the test and then forget
- **Long-Term Memory:** will remember for much longer because the brain has made connections

# Summing up:

- Teach 5-8 words at a time for deep understanding
- Use brain-based strategies to make connections
- Have students critically think about words and their meanings
- Introduce, practice, and review for long-term memory
- Make vocabulary engaging and meaningful

# References

Beck, I. McKeon, M. & Kucan, L. (2013). Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction, 2nd Edition. Guilford Press.

Curzan, A. & Adams, M. (2012). How English works: A linguistic introduction. Glenview, IL: Pearson.

Graves, F., August, D. & Mancille-Martinez, J. (2013). Teaching vocabulary to English language learners. NY: Teachers College Press.

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# Links to Resources

- Selecting Vocabulary Words Using 3 Tier System:  
<https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/selecting-vocabulary-words-teach-english-language-learners>
- Word Maps:  
[https://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/word\\_maps](https://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/word_maps)
- Vocabulary Knowledge Rating Scale:  
<https://sniderreadingincontentarea.weebly.com/vocabulary-rating-guide.html>

# Thank you!

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# Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. Consider how you typically help students engage with and remember new vocabulary. Are there any successful strategies that you use that weren't covered in today's session? Share your ideas!
2. Discuss the strategies from this session that will be beneficial to incorporate into your instruction.
3. Do you recycle and/or recheck vocabulary knowledge after a unit ends? If so, discuss how you do so. If not, discuss how you might begin assessing students to see which words make it into their long-term memory.



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